Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges

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Looking over a cleared site at Shooting Tree Ridge are (from left) Mark Hall, DNR biologist and forester; Larry King, owner of King Logging; and Dr. Jim Carter, a member of the Mountain Bridge Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Jocassee Gorges Forest Management Planning ad hoc Committee. The selective thinning of about 175 acres of planted pine in Jocassee Gorges will improve wildlife habitat and provide wildlife viewing areas. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Jocassee timber harvest improves wildlife habitat

Selective thinning of about 175 acres of planted pine in the Jocassee Gorges tract has been completed, improving wildlife habitat and netting about $40,000 that will be reinvested in the property.

The thinning operation was carried out on land within the Jim Timmerman Natural Resource Area at Jocassee Gorges known as the Shooting Tree Ridge Tract. Located on the south-central side of Jocassee Gorges, the 571-acre tract was purchased from Crescent Resources in 2001 using funds from the Forest Legacy Program along with a contribution from the National Wild Turkey Federation. Most of the Shooting Tree Ridge tract is planted in loblolly or white pine plantations 20 to 25 years old.

Mark Hall, wildlife biologist and forester with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) supervised the timber thinning operation, which was carried out by King Logging of Liberty, owned by Larry King. "The thinning operation was implemented with all the special considerations outlined in the management plan," Hall said. "King and I reviewed logistics almost daily to ensure that the wildlife habitat was favorably changed, that cultural resources were avoided and to make certain that soil and water resources were protected."

The proceeds from roughly 175 acres of planted loblolly pine generated about $40,000, and the money will be reinvested in the property to provide public access, restore plant communities and to maintain habitat crucial for species such as black bear and songbirds.

"The thinning was not done specifically to generate revenue," Hall said, "but to improve habitat values, reduce the chances of pine beetle damage and subsequent timber lo ss, and to reduce the fire hazard associated with dense woodlands with heavy fuel loads. The DNR will use prescribed fire to burn about half of the thinned

Continued on page 2

Laurel Valley Lodge restaurant opens for business

Laurel Valley Lodge restaurant is once again open for business, and hunters and hikers alike can enjoy fresh trout and certified Angus beef in rustic surroundings while listening to bluegrass music.

Laurel Valley Lodge, which was donated to the state by Frank Masters of Sunset and had been closed for several years following renovations, has been reopened by Larry Looper, owner of the Parkette restaurant in Pickens.

The rustic atmosphere at the restaurant is family oriented, Looper said, and children will enjoy walks along nearby Eastatoee Creek. Diners can enjoy fresh trout and certified Angus beef, and bluegrass bands will sometimes play at the restaurant. Attire for the restaurant is casual, although Looper said most diners dress "pretty nicely." Looper recommends reservations.

Laurel Valley Lodge restaurant, located in Rocky Bottom off US 178, is now open for dinner on Friday and Saturday evenings. Diners can now enjoy fresh trout and certified Angus beef in the midst of the splendors of Jocassee Gorges. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)

"It's good food and good friends," Looper said, "a good place to come and meet people or bring friends with you."

Laurel Valley Lodge is open Fridays and Saturdays, from 5 p.m. until. For reservations, call (864) 878-2400 until 2 p.m. Friday, and after that call (864) 878-1510, which is the direct number to the lodge. Major credit cards are accepted at the restaurant.

Jocassee timber harvest improves habitat

Continued from page 1

woodlands in the future in order to maintain habitat values and reduce fuel loads. Ecological burns will be coordinated with the S.C. Forestry Commission and neighboring landowners."

King used about one million dollars worth of heavy equipment to implement a surgical operation in thinning the pines on the Shooting Tree Ridge tract. Hall said that King maintains state-of-the-art, good logging equipment.

"When you get a shabby logger with the doors falling off the skidders, and you notice grease and oil dripping everywhere, you can expect trouble, because the rest of his operation will be like the equipment—shoddy," Hall said. "King is just the opposite. He maintains his equipment in top condition, uses his bulldozer to engineer the roads and skid trails to avoid environmental impacts and it shows in the final result. You'd think he was preparing a golf course for Jack Nicklaus, as he is so meticulous about his whole operation. But that is good for us, as we need to practice what we preach up here and demonstrate to the public that logging timber can be a good thing when it is done properly." Dale Mason, the S.C. Forestry Commission's Best Management Practice forester, critically reviewed environmental compliance matters and gave the entire operation flying colors in his final assessment.

Hall said King is a conservationist and supports policies of natural resource agencies like the DNR. "King enjoys outdoor activities like hunting, fishing and hiking," Hall said. "He respects the natural world he works in every day and has taken extra measures to help understand how to carry on an environmentally sensitive logging operation." King attended the "Top Logger" courses taught by the S.C. Forestry Commission with help from other agencies such as DNR.

The assistance of Jocassee Gorges neighbors was sought to spread seed and fertilizer to help stabilize the soils and protect the Shooting Tree Ridge site for future generations, according to Hall. Local conservationist and Eastatoee Valley resident Wes Cooler fired up his tractor and pitched in after signing a DNR volunteer agreement. "I had to sign my life away in order to work for free!" Cooler said. "But I enjoy pitching in when good things are going on, and it just makes sense to try to put back a little more than you take." Cooler and Hall worked together to identify critical elements in the logging operation and came up with strategies for soil protection and road safety.

Elusive New England cottontail can be found in Jocassee

By Anna Huckabee

Most people are familiar with the Eastern cottontail rabbit (Sylvilagus floridanus), but many have never heard of, much less seen, the more elusive New England cottontail (Sylvilagus transitionalis), also found in South Carolina. The New England cottontail ranges from Pennsylvania to Georgia and is a "species of special concern" in South Carolina, although their populations appear to be stable. This little known species is found in Oconee, Greenville, and Pickens counties, making it one of Jocassee's special inhabitants.

The New England cottontail rabbit, found in Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties, is a species of special concern in Jocassee Gorges.

Looking at the two species, they appear identical to the untrained eye. However, upon closer inspection, the New England cottontail has shorter ears, a smaller body mass, and often a black spot between the ears. There may also be a black edging to the ears. DNA analysis is the most definitive technique in determining species.

New England cottontails also differ from the more numerous Eastern cottontails in habitat and diet. Whereas Easterns prefer more open lands such as farms, fields, and open woodlands, New Englands inhabit higher elevations where shrubs, regenerating clearcuts, and conifers occur. New Englands can digest woody material better, even consuming conifer needles, and are often found in more wooded habitats than Easterns. Despite the subtle differences in habitat preference, Easterns can easily establish themselves in areas once dominated by New Englands if fragmentation and fingers of suitable habitat give them corridors into the higher elevations. It is still a matter of dispute whether competition with the Eastern cottontail or loss of more suitable habitat is the more damaging to the New England cottontail's populations. Biologists suggest the best habitat for South Carolina's New England cottontail inhabitants is about 25-acre patches of young pines to mixed pine-hardwoods with openings interspersed throughout the stand. Browse and cover are extremely important, whereas permanent agriculture is detrimental to their success. There are areas in Jocassee, especially some of the powerline right-of-ways, that may serve this purpose. Perhaps more visitors to the Jocassee area will catch a glimpse of these New England cottontails, especially now that they know they exist!

For more information on New England cottontails, visit the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife website at http://www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dfw/dfwcotontail.htm or contact Mary Bunch, wildlife biologist with the South Carolina DNR, at (864) 654-6738, extension 15.

(Anna Huckabee is a wildlife biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and did her master's degree work in the Jocassee Gorges.)

SC MAPS environmental education program goes from the mountains to the sea

By Amie Spitzer
Clemson University

You probably know the history behind the formation of Lake Jocassee. You perhaps even know the origin of the name for the Jocassee Gorges region. You may even know some of how the Jocassee Gorges began to form around 300 million years ago. But will the next generation of South Carolinians? Those of us at the SC MAPS Project Office located at Clemson University want to make sure today's kids know this and much more about our wonderful state.

SC MAPS (South Carolina Maps and Aerial Photographic Systems) is a fantastic curriculum that combines aerial photographic images, topographic maps, an in-depth curriculum and challenging activities to provide meaningful connections among math, science, social studies and language arts for middle school students. This program takes an in-depth look at the five major land forms for our state, focusing on several study sites, one of which includes the Jocassee Gorges region.

Through this program, students will be exposed to the geological history of the state's formation, the cultural heritage of the Native American, African and pioneer influences up to the modern day life and times of South Carolinians. They will have opportunities to discover the many environments that support numerous plant and animal species and man's influences on these environments. Students will learn the history of the state's many battles and the effects of their outcomes. They will gain an understanding of their diverse and wondrous state and their place in it both today and tomorrow. If you are interested in finding out more about this program, feel free to contact the SC MAPS Project office at (864) 656-1560 or send an e-mail to mannett@clemson.edu.

How I spent my summer vacation along the Whitewater River
...between 1963 and 1969

By Scott Henderson Sikes

Perhaps the greatest times in my brother Steve's life and in my own were the glorious three month summer vacations we spent with our grandparents at the Tree Top Inn along the Whitewater River—now nearly 300 feet under Lake Jocassee—between about 1963 and 1969. The outline of the Tree Top Inn is still visible on topographical maps of the Lake Jocassee area as a square with a very long driveway leading down to the Whitewater River. The home site was roughly due north of where Devils Fork State Park is today.

In those days, the area now known as the Jocassee Gorges was known as the "Jocassee Valley" or simply "Jocassee." Greenville newspapers called it "South Carolina's Little Switzerland." According to family papers I've found, my mother's parents, Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Henderson Sr., bought the Tree Top Inn as a summer cabin in 1945 from Irene H. Keith (Mrs. G.E. Keith). The earliest paperwork I have found in family files is an insurance policy from 1945 listing the address as "20 miles north from Pickens, S.C. in Jocassee Valley near White Water Falls." According to family tax records, the property was 17 acres along the river.

Pictured here is a photo of the house taken between 1945 and 1947. The house had a large open porch with several overstuffed sofas and padded wicker chairs arranged for leisurely reading, napping and chatting. The tin roof made for great listening during the rainy afternoons of late summer Dog Days. Also pictured is a snapshot taken in the summer of 1952 just before my (now late) parents were married. What we boys didn't know a decade later was that our three months away from our parents each year probably kept them sane and afforded them a three-month honeymoon/vacation. They usually stayed at the Inn a week when they dropped us off and a week at the end of the summer when they came to pick us up.

These photographs are old and faded. The only tangible things we have left are a few photographs and the "Tree Top Inn" wooden sign that hung over the door to the porch. However, a clearer picture of the old two-story house and the people who loved it and the area is not to be found in things or photographs—the Tree Top Inn and the Jocassee Valley are clearly visible in my heart and in my mind's eye.

Recalling the whole scene now, I remember that our grandfather, known as "G.W." to most folks, was an amateur pilot. He flew small airplanes (like his yellow 1938 Piper Cub J-3) from Greenville to Mr. C.O. Williams' grass runway alongside the Attakulla Lodge (two homesites up the valley from the Tree Top Inn). Attakulla was the name of the Cherokee chief at the time of Quaker naturalist William Bartram's travels. "C.O." was "G.W.'s" good friend and neighbor in Jocassee, and they kept honeybees as a hobby. My brother and I rode our pony or in our pony cart, bicycled, picked blackberries along the driveway/road, drove a motorized go-kart on a little track graded in our corn field, skipped stones in the river, swam and floated on car tire inner tubes in the cold, clear river. My brother learned to drive on the sand road along the river in a 1946 Willys Jeep painted gloss black with red interior and a white canvas top. As you quietly cruise Lake Jocassee in your kayak or pontoon boat today, imagine hearing young boys laughing and playing along the rhododendron-lined riverbanks 300 feet below.

This photo of the Tree Top Inn, along the Whitewater River, was taken in 1945. The house was up on a hillside and the main floor was essentially up on stilts. The view from the porch was truly a "tree top" view. (Photos courtesy of Scott Henderson Sikes)

If you would like to learn more about the Jocassee Valley before the dam and beautiful lake were built, Claudia Whitmire Hembree is the author of a new book with stories about and photos of the families who lived year-round or summered in Jocassee from early Native Americans to the 20th Century. Look for it on the bookshelves at Devils Fork State Park before Christmas 2003. The title is "Jocassee Valley," and it is being printed by Hiott Printing Co. in Pickens. For ordering information write Claudia W. Hembree, 19 Fernwood Drive, Taylors, SC 29687.

(Scott Henderson Sikes lives in Athens, Ga., and is the University of Georgia's director of major gifts. He would be happy to hear from you about your pre-Lake Jocassee experiences. His e-mail address is ssikes@uga.edu.)

This summer 1952 photo was taken inside the Tree Top Inn of the author's late parents, Ouita Lucile Henderson and Lewis Edward "Buddy" Sikes. This was taken a few months before they were married. They were married in Greenville in October 1952.

Grant funds allow sustainable development at Devils Fork State Park

By Michael L. Trotter
Devils Fork State Park Ranger

New trail additions at Devils Fork State Park will improve visitor access to use areas while reducing visitor impact.

During the past year, the park staff constructed paved impact trails for walk-in tent sites 21-25 and for the Villa boat dock area. Through the years these areas have received heavy use and were beginning to show severe signs of erosion. The new trails coupled with the cedar fencing that borders each trail helps to curb further erosion by eliminating multiple habitat trails that kill native vegetation. The improvements also minimize impact by providing a solid and permanent walkway. The addition of the impact trails clearly defined each use area, making it easier for visitors to locate them. A new bulletin board was also constructed in the picnic area at the beginning of the impact trail leading to the tent sites.

The impact trails also make getting to Lake Jocassee easier. An impact trail along the lakeshore in the tent site area helps halt shoreline erosion by preventing campers from traversing steep slopes and directing them to a central access location. Also, the impact trails connect the tent sites to the main campground giving campers easier access to restrooms and eliminating much of the walk through traffic on certain RV sites. The trails in the Villa area function in the same manner by allowing guests easy access to either the boat dock or Lake Jocassee's shoreline.

Newly installed walkways at Devils Fork State Park will make getting around easier for visitors and lessen impact on the park's natural resources. (PRT photo by Michael L. Trotter

Funding for these projects originated from an Oconee County Accommodations Tax Grant totaling $12,467. New fire rings with grills were also installed at select sites using these funds. Devils Fork State Park and the South Carolina State Park Service appreciate Oconee County's generosity and cooperation in providing additional funding for the improvements made to the facilities at Devils Fork State Park, which will allow these use areas to remain viable for years to come.

Leslie Morgan of the DNR's Land, Water and Conservation Division hangs up a Krispy Kreme dougnut as part of the "bait" for a multi-agency bear DNA study in the Southern Appalachians. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Southern Appalachian bear study involves DNR and many partners

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources and partners in three other states are taking part in a genetics study to monitor the population of black bears in the Southern Appalachians.

"This bear study is all about natural resource partnerships," said Skip Still, assistant regional wildlife biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) based in Clemson. "Different parts of DNR are working together to make this happen, and we're also working with other state and federal natural resources agencies." Partners in the bear DNA study include the state natural resource agencies in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, University of Tennessee, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Krispy Kreme Doughnuts and U.S. Geological Survey. The U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Forest Service are funding the majority of the project.

The research, which will determine the feasibility of DNA sampling to monitor black bear populations in the Southern Appalachians, involves hair traps baited with sweets (Krispy Kreme doughnuts) and raspberry extract. The hair traps are composed of barbed-wire fence, between 14-16 inches high, strung around trees in a square pattern, with the doughnuts and raspberry extract in the middle. To get the bait, bears are forced to go under or over the barbed wire, and hair snags on it. The bait is configured so that other animals cannot reach it. Researchers go by once a week to collect the hair for genetic testing. The hair will be sent to a U.S. Geological Survey laboratory in West Virginia.

Twenty-eight hair-trap sites were established in South Carolina, all on U.S. Forest Service lands in Oconee County. Black bear hair-sampling sites have also been set up in North Carolina and Georgia. Still gave much of the credit for making the South Carolina portion of the research possible to Leslie Morgan, regional director with the Land, Water and Conservation Division of the South Carolina DNR. Morgan used Geographic Positioning System (GPS) and mapping technology, commonly used in his division, to locate the sites to be used by the biologists of the DNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. "This is a perfect example of good science made possible by two divisions within the DNR working together, for the good of the resource," Still said.

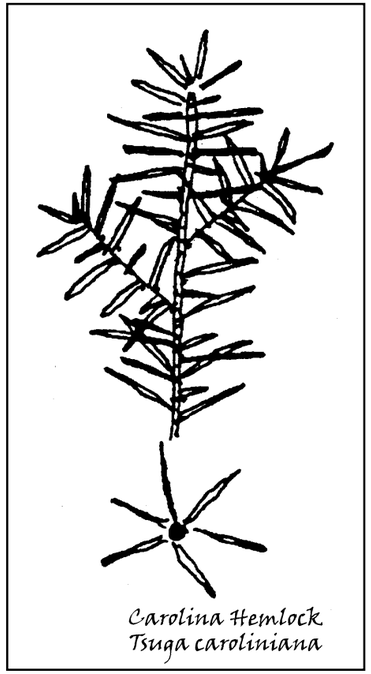
Morgan said, "It is not a story of which division claimed ownership. It is a showcase of how the divisions of DNR can work together to learn more about our natural resources. It was not a division project; it was an agency project. When state and federal divisions and agencies are willing to work together everyone wins, most of all the resource."

State and federal agencies in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee formed the Southern Appalachian Black Bear Study Group in the mid-1970s. Since its formation, the bear group has worked to share bear data and develop consistent bear-related surveys. Because the participants manage a shared bear population across four states, the group has identified a need for an accurate regional population estimates and the ability to track trends in the bear population over time. A regional population estimate would be important to guide management decisions.

Can the Carolina hemlock be saved from woolly adelgids?

By Dennis Chastain

The invasive insect pest, hemlock woolly adelgid, is now firmly entrenched in the Jocassee Gorges property. I have personally seen heavy infestations of these little woolly boogers at nearly a dozen widely dispersed locations from Pinnacle Mountain to Laurel Fork Creek. Since these pernicious pests are moving unchecked through the Jocassee Gorges area, one can only assume that the familiar Eastern hemlock is doomed. In other areas of the East where the hemlock woolly adelgid has had its way, somewhere between 80-95 percent of the trees are now dead or dying.



Illustrations by George Polk from the "Guide to the Foothills Trail".

Anyone who spends any time at all in the great out-of-doors in the Carolina mountains is familiar with the Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). It is hard to imagine the woods without the towering presence of these characteristic conifers, but that seems to be where we are headed. It's bad enough to lose the Eastern hemlock, but there is another species of hemlock that occurs in the South Carolina mountains, which is also susceptible to hemlock woolly adelgids.

The Carolina hemlock (*Tsuga caroliniana*) is a rare species in South Carolina and only ranges from Virginia to South Carolina. This handsome conifer is easily distinguished from the Eastern hemlock by a few key characteristics. First, in South Carolina it only grows on a few high ridges and around some rock outcrops. Next, the needles of the Eastern hemlock are all located on one plane, lying almost flat. The needles of Carolina hemlock occur all around the twig, giving the tree a darker green, more robust, appearance, very much like a fir tree. The species was first discovered right here on Table Rock mountain way back in 1856. The Carolina hemlock has been described as, " perhaps the handsomest of any eastern American conifer, combining in a remarkable way delicacy, symmetry, and strength."

Sadly, if we don't do something fast, we are going to lose the Carolina hemlock too. I recently traveled to Columbia and made an appeal to the newly appointed S.C. Natural Resources Board to try to save the Carolina hemlock. I told the board that while the situation with the Eastern hemlock may seem overwhelming, it is entirely possible to protect and preserve our few populations of Carolina hemlock. Because they tend to occur in discrete colonies far from streams, any of the three widely accepted treatment methods, release of ladybird beetles, treatment with insecticidal soap sprays and injections of systemic chemicals, are viable options. Only time will tell whether we can obtain the funds and put a plan together to save the Carolina hemlock.

(Dennis Chastain is a Pickens County naturalist and outdoors writer who has been hiking, hunting and fishing in the Jocassee Gorges for 30 years.)

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Jocassee Gorges offers challenging deer hunting

By Charles Ruth
South Carolina DNR

The white-tailed deer is the most popular, economically important, and controversial game species in South Carolina, and the Jocassee Gorges offer perhaps the most challenging deer hunting in the state.

The mountainous terrain presents the hunter with major hurdles related to access, and the poor soils and late-successional stages of vegetation typical of Jocassee produce only a fraction of the deer found elsewhere in South Carolina. However, the condition of the animals is generally good to very good, with the state record typical buck being taken in Pickens County in 1994.

Deer hunting in Jocassee Gorges can be a rugged and rewarding experience for those willing to wear out a little shoe leather. (DNR photo)

Condition of deer in the mountains appears closely tied to the annual production of mast such as acorns, persimmons, and grapes. For that reason, the breeding season or rut occurs in late November and early December, which is about one month later than in other areas in the state. Not only can hunters take advantage of the late breeding season, but the early portions of the deer season coincide with this mast production, and hunters can use these natural food sources to locate areas frequented by deer.

Hunters looking for the challenge of wilderness-like hunting and the prospect of taking a quality deer should not overlook the Jocassee Gorges.

(Charles Ruth is the leader of the DNR's Deer Project.)